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ABSTRACT

This fifth chapter in "Elementary School Counseling in a Changing World" contains four journal articles which focus on exceptional children and helping elementary school counselors build a supportive learning environment for exceptional children. "Primary Prevention for Gifted Students: A Parent Education Group" by Elizabeth Conroy describes a counseling group for parents of exceptional children. "Parent Counseling in Special Education: Case Description of a Novel Approach" by Charles Humes explains the conceptualization and evolution of a parent facilitation program for parents of special education students in one school district. "A Program for Training Teachers as Counselors of Parents of Children with Disabilities" by Judy Berry presents the basic components of an in-service training program that can be used by counselors to train teachers to work more effectively with parents through integration of counseling theory and special education practice. "Books Can Break Attitudinal Barriers Toward the Handicapped" by Carolyn Bauer discusses the use of books to help children become increasingly sensitive to the needs of handicapped students. Practical suggestions are given for helpful books in such areas as visual handicaps, speech handicaps, learning disabilities, auditory impairments, intellectual handicaps, and orthopedic impairments. The chapter concludes with a set of issues for elementary school counselors to consider about a world of exceptional children. (NB)

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CHAPTER 5

A WORLD OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

The noted personality theorist, Harry Stack Sullivan, once noted, "In most general terms, we are all much more simply human than otherwise." There are many children in our schools, however, who are labelled exceptional and find it difficult to accept that they are "simply human." These children need to feel accepted and to use their exceptional characteristics in extraordinary ways. Children who are not so-labelled need to learn ways of benefitting from those who are exceptional. The parents and teachers of exceptional children also need to find ways to understand and assist these youngsters. This chapter helps elementary school counselors build a supportive learning environment for exceptional children.

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Chapter 5 begins with Michael Skinner's article which establishes the need for strong ties between counseling and special education. Skinner's work is followed by a series of articles dealing with the importance of counseling programs for parents of exceptional children. Elizabeth Conroy discusses a counseling group for parents of gifted children. As Conroy states, parents of gifted youngsters have unique needs resulting from misunderstandings created by "myths, stereotypes, and the small number of gifted children in the population." Charles Humes follows with an excellent case example of counseling with parents of handicapped children. Humes notes that "counseling for parents does exist in the schools, but not to the depth or extent necessary for special education cases." Next, Judy Berry presents a counselor-led training program designed to help teachers work more effectively with parents of handicapped children. Berry observes that the teacher "is in a position to develop an active, ongoing relationship with parents but may lack the training to provide effective counseling support."

Carolyn Bauer concludes the chapter with her provocative article on using books to help children become increasingly sensitive to the needs of handicapped students. She points out that "children's books can play a positive role in breaking attitudinal barriers for the handicapped." The article is filled with practical suggestions about which books are the most helpful in such areas as visual handicaps, speech handicaps, learning disabilities, auditory impairments, intellectual handicaps, and orthopedic impairments.

The 1990s will bring new challenges for elementary school counselors in working with exceptional children. Counselors can best meet this challenge by collaborating with parents and teachers to make the school environment increasingly sensitive to the needs and aspirations of exceptional children.

Primary Prevention for Gifted Students: A Parent Education Group

Elizabeth H. Conroy

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, there has been renewed concern about meeting the needs of gifted children in the educational system. Several authors (Culross, 1982; Dettman & Colangelo, 1980; North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented [NCAGT] Task Force, 1986) have discussed the role of the school counselor in this effort. Among the most recent research is a 4-year study by Cox (1986). These results demonstrated that counseling services are essential in successful educational programs for gifted students.

School counselors can have many different functions in helping gifted students. Some of these functions, such as program selection and career and college advisement, are more necessary in the secondary school setting than at other levels. Counseling with students in response to social, emotional, and academic problems is important at all levels. At the elementary school level, counselors need to exercise their function of consultation with administrators, teachers, and parents. Culross (1982) urged counselors to become involved in preventing problems by encouraging the healthy growth and development of gifted children. Elementary counselors can help provide the psychologically safe environment recommended in Cox's (1986) report by consulting with those people who design programs and those who live and work with gifted children every day.

In her summary of research, Herbert (1982) established the importance of identifying a child's talents and abilities early so that these traits can flourish. Van Tassel-Baska (1985) stated that one of the current national trends in gifted education is the increase in programs at the elementary school level. This trend provides an opportunity for elementary school counselors to be instrumental in clarifying the needs of gifted students and promoting the development of appropriate educational strategies. Glennon (1985) suggested that counselors assess the advantages and disadvantages of the three major current approaches to meeting the educational needs of gifted children: (a) enrichment, (b) special grouping, and (c) acceleration. Counselors need this kind of information to consult effectively with administrators, teachers, and parents in designing or evaluating educational approaches or activities.

Parent Consultation

Communication with parents is an essential function of an elementary school counselor. Traditionally, counselors have joined with teachers in meeting with parents individually when a concern has arisen about a student's progress in school. In recent years, counselors have been urged to spend more of their time in preventive efforts (Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1984). Because parents are the major influence on the mental health of their children, changing parents' attitudes or behavior can have a significant impact on the development of children.

Some research has demonstrated that parent education is an effective way to help parents develop healthy attitudes toward their children and useful techniques for raising them (Bundy & Poppen, 1986; Dembo, Sweitzer, & Lauritzen, 1985). Parent education approaches have been shown to affect family environment (Campbell & Sutton, 1983), parent-child communication (Bredehoft & Hey, 1985), child-rearing behavior, student motivation, academic achievement (Bundy & Poppen, 1986), and child learning (Bergan, Neumann, & Karp, 1983). Some of the most commonly used parent education programs include *Parent Effectiveness Training* (Gordon, 1970), *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting* (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976), *Parents Are Teachers* (Becker, 1976), and *Self-Esteem: A Family Affair* (Clarke, 1978). School counselors have used these and other approaches in parent education groups.

Needs of Parents of Gifted Children

Parents of gifted children have many needs that are similar to those of all parents and some needs that are unique. The unique needs are based on the exceptionality of their children. Because of myths, stereotypes, and the small number of gifted children in the population, gifted children are frequently misunderstood. Parents may react with mixed emotions to the awareness of their child's special abilities. Parents may be uncomfortable knowing their child is "different" and may be confused about their role in the process of educating their child. They may not share their concerns or seek help because they do not want to sound "elitist."

Dettman and Colangelo (1980) recommended that school counselors and parents of gifted children use a partnership approach in which the "parents and counselor make joint decisions on the best direction to meet the educational needs of the gifted child" (p. 160). One way to begin a partnership and give parents information to make well-informed decisions is to offer them a parent education group. An appropriate time to offer such a group is when the school system first identifies their children as gifted. At this point, parents may have a

need to understand the meaning of the term and ways to cope with their feelings. If they have been aware of their child's exceptional abilities, the school's data may be the first confirmation of these abilities. If the parents have not realized how exceptional their child is, they may have numerous questions about how to raise such a child.

A group approach is a very effective way to meet these needs. Parents can be provided with information regarding the results of research in gifted education and can be made aware of available literature and resources. For the counselor, such information can be shared more efficiently in a group. Another advantage of the group approach is the interaction among parents. When they discover that other parents have similar needs, a supporting network develops. Additionally, their perspective will be broadened by being exposed to issues relevant to other parents. To accomplish these goals, a group that offers both information and participation is most useful. The school counselor, as leader of the group, can establish a relationship with parents that will be beneficial throughout the child's school career.

The Parent Education Group

With these considerations in mind, I developed a three-session parent workshop. The purpose of the group was twofold: (a) to help parents develop a better understanding of their children and (b) to increase their comfort in raising their gifted children. The workshop was offered at two different times for 1 hour on 3 consecutive Saturdays. It was held during an enrichment program for gifted children sponsored by the Durham, North Carolina, chapter of Parents for the Advancement of Gifted Education (PAGE), a statewide organization affiliated with NCAGT. Although attendance varied somewhat, 23 parents participated in each group.

Session 1: Definition and Identification

The purpose of the first session is to help parents understand the meaning of the label *gifted*. Parents are asked to introduce themselves and tell the names, ages, and enrichment classes of their gifted children.The leader begins by presenting several current definitions of giftedness. First, the group leader introduces the traditional definition and identification in use since the 1920s, which equated giftedness with high intelligence quotients. Subsequently, the leader explains that identification systems used since 1980 involve the use of multiple measures (e.g., achievement test scores, classroom performance, checklists completed by teachers and parents, student products, intelligence test scores). Renzulli's

(1978) three-ring conception of giftedness is then introduced. Renzulli suggested that individuals who are considered gifted have a combination of task commitment, creativity, and above-average intelligence. This definition enlarges the percentage of gifted students. After presenting these definitions of giftedness, the leader discusses the local school definition and identification standards.

The last part of the session is a presentation of characteristics that have been used to describe the gifted. The parents are given copies of descriptive characteristics by different authors, such as Juntune (1985) and Clark (1983). The leader asks the parents to look carefully at Clark's list of characteristics, needs, and concomitant problems. This leads to the topic of the next session, a discussion of needs and problems of gifted children. Additionally, the information provided in this session helps the parents identify their children's gifts without depending completely on evaluations based on test scores, which, in turn, will help them note and foster strengths in the children that may not be addressed by school programs. In the final 10 minutes of the session the leader invites comments and questions from the parents.

Session 2: Needs and Problems

This session is designed to cover cognitive and social-emotional needs of gifted children, some approaches used to meet these needs, and problems often faced by gifted children. After reviewing the main points from the previous session, the leader explains one approach to understanding cognitive needs. An outline of Bloom's taxonomy (1956) is reviewed, and the leader presents the recommendation by many educators of the gifted that gifted students should spend less time with activities requiring the lower levels of thinking (i.e., knowledge, comprehension) and more time on application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Teaching that meets the cognitive needs of the gifted can be accomplished in various ways: (a) through administrative arrangements, such as enrichment within the regular classroom, ability grouping, or acceleration by individual students to higher grades for all or part of the day, or (b) through curriculum modifications that can be used in any setting. Curriculum modifications include such approaches as (a) acceleration in subject matter, (b) enrichment of topics covered in the regular curriculum, (c) opportunities for students to pursue their interests in constructive ways, and (d) opportunities for students to use their learning to solve real-world problems (Aubrecht, 1986).

Many of the social-emotional needs of the gifted children are similar to those of all children, and gifted children may have problems getting their needs met. In this session, the leader presents the following issues for discussion: (a) positive self-concept, (b) family and adult relationships, (c) peer relationships,

(d) communication skills, (e) discipline, and (f) freedom from stress or depression. Gifted children frequently have different attitudes, sensitivities, and interests than do other children their age. These discrepancies can cause difficulties with relationships and self-satisfaction. The challenging nature of helping gifted children develop social skills and emotional health is discussed with the parents using information from Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan (1982).

During the last 30 minutes of the session, parents are invited to discuss questions, concerns, or problems of their own children. When I led this session, parents discussed issues such as their children's (a) unwillingness to try new things because of a fear of failure, (b) extremely high expectations of themselves, (c) lack of motivation in school, (d) difficulties with peers, (e) being bored in school, (f) not wanting to leave the regular classroom to go to a gifted resource room, and (g) sibling relationships. Parents are encouraged to respond to others and share experiences and ideas with each other.

At the end of Session 2, parents are given an assignment for the following week: to write a brief paragraph describing a problem with which their child is confronted and how it is resolved. Copies of suggestions for rearing gifted children are distributed. These suggestions are taken from various sources, including Ginsberg and Harrison (1977), Hall and Skinner (1980), Jackson (1985), and Sebring (1986). In addition, parents are invited to check out folders containing more information and explanation of additional topics such as acceleration, activities at home, creativity, discipline, sibling relationships, stress and perfectionism, and underachievement.

Session 3: Resources

The purpose of the final session is to discuss successful approaches to educating and rearing gifted children and to inform participants of ways to obtain additional information. This session begins with the leader asking parents to share positive experiences in resolving problems faced by their children. Examples sometimes shared by parents are (a) developing an individualized program in a public school, (b) encouraging a gifted child to try new things, and (c) deciding to accelerate to a higher grade.

After 30 minutes of discussion, the leader summarizes the discussion and lists various resources on the chalkboard. These resources include (a) books; (b) magazines; (c) national, state, and local organizations; (d) local school personnel; (e) local consultants on gifted education; and (f) community resources available for enrichment activities. Finally, an evaluation questionnaire and copies of resources are distributed. The resources include (a) an article by Sawyer (1984), (b) an application for the National Association for Gifted Children, (c) an application for NCAGT, (d) a cover page of *Gifted Child*

Monthly, (e) an application for the *1987 Educational Opportunity Guide*, published by Duke University's Talent Identification Program (Sawyer & Rigsby, 1987), and (f) a bibliography for parents.

Evaluation and Implications

I designed this workshop to help parents better understand their gifted children and to assist them in feeling more comfortable in their role as parents. I expected that this feeling of comfort would result from the following experiences: (a) a better understanding of the label *gifted*, (b) an awareness that gifted children have special needs and problems, (c) a recognition that some needs and problems of their children may be related to their giftedness, (d) a realization that most suggestions for rearing gifted children include familiar ideas, and (e) the knowledge of available resources for help and further information. Parents' awareness of resources such as school staff, other parents, organizations, and literature, should help them continue to be able to meet the needs and resolve the problems of their children as they grow and develop.

After participation in this group, most parents demonstrated understanding of the need for gifted children to (a) develop higher level thinking skills, (b) pursue their own interests, and (c) learn self-discipline. Parents also increased their personal comfort level by discussing the needs and problems of their gifted children. One parent expressed her relief in recognizing that some of her daughter's problems were common to other gifted children. After each of the three sessions, parents stayed to discuss personal situations in more depth with the leader. Many parents indicated a desire for more sessions and an interest in getting to know other participants better. Teachers and administrators noted comments made by participating parents that indicated a growth in understanding.

After a workshop of this nature, a variety of options for follow-up are possible. Counselors can (a) consult with parents, individually or in group meetings, about common issues faced by gifted students; (b) join resource or classroom teachers in annual reviews or occasional meetings; (c) publish or contribute to a parent newsletter with hints, reminders, and updates on material presented in the workshop; and (d) offer counseling groups in which parents explore concerns and problems more deeply. Counselors should become involved with teachers and parents of gifted children to plan appropriate services for these students throughout their school careers.

Educators of gifted children have concluded that parent education and guidance are necessary components of education for gifted children (Dettman & Colangelo, 1980). Offering a parent education group is one effective way for counselors to begin a partnership with parents. Because parents are ultimately

responsible for the education and mental health of their children, they need information to make good decisions. Schools need cooperation and information from parents to plan an effective educational program for their gifted students. Elementary counselors can be instrumental in beginning a positive relationship between home and school while implementing parent consultation strategies as a means of primary prevention for gifted children.

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Parent Counseling in Special Education: Case Description of a Novel Approach

Charles W. Humes

Counseling for the parents of handicapped children is required by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142), but is poorly implemented in most school districts (Humes, 1978; McDowell, 1976). Formal services are not materializing for a number of reasons such as lack of money or time, not enough trained school staff, and the work schedules of parents (McDowell, 1976). As a result, attempts by school districts to implement this counseling have fallen short of the requirements (Humes & Munsey, 1984). Gargiulo (1985) stated that barriers have been erected between parents and professionals and this has exacerbated the situation. Although school counselors often do counsel parents, such counseling is not conducted to the extent required by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. In addition, other pupil services and special education staff have not met the need.

Parents in a number of locations have reacted to the perceived lack of service by developing the parent-as-partners concept. For example, the following programs exist: the Center to Assist Parents—Professionals (CAP-P) in Des Moines, Iowa; the Parent Facilitator Program in San Diego, California; and the Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. These organizations were formed by parent groups to work cooperatively with school personnel and to bring about understanding of and participation in special education programs for their children. Until then the history of parent-professional partnerships in special education had not been productive (Gallagher, Beckman, & Cross, 1983). This movement to improve parent-professional partnerships was probably influenced by the peers-as-helpers idea that exists in other settings and populations.

Some of these parent groups plan formal group meetings and produce information on the special needs of children. Others emphasize the understanding of federal and state laws regarding the rights of parents and their handicapped children. Most of the programs train parent facilitators who work with other parents to listen to concerns, help formulate annual goals, attend team meetings as advisers, and help in determining a child's placement. In addition, the parent facilitators help parents to accept a child's handicap and to set realistic goals for the child in terms of physical, mental, and emotional development. Thus, the emphasis is on offering a continuum of parental training and counseling.

One goal of these parent facilitation programs is to gain cooperation and support from pupil services staff, particularly school counselors, psychologists, and social workers. The most successful efforts use pupil services staff as part of the instructional cadre. This is a desirable strategy because it offers professional assistance to the parent facilitators and enables school staff to express points of view, define parameters, and provide cautions. Such professional participation also seems to defuse the notion that the intent is only child advocacy and adversarial action.

In this article I described the conceptualization and evolution of a parent facilitation program in one school district. This program evolved spontaneously and not as a result of direct knowledge of other similar efforts. It was a grass roots idea spearheaded by a few activist parents who sensed that relationships were not good between dissatisfied parents and the pupil services-special education community. The program description is not presented as a model or paradigm for success. It delineates how such a project was started, implemented, and evaluated and also describes how counselors can participate. The project's title—Parent Assisters—was selected with great care to convey to both parents and professionals alike that it was facilitative in intent.

Parent Assisters

Parent Assisters is a cooperative, school-based support program for parents of handicapped children at all grade levels in a small, suburban school district. The school district includes 15 schools with a total of approximately 9,000 pupils. The school population is heterogeneous in socioeconomic makeup, and there are few minority students. The school district has good local financial support for public education.

The Parent Assisters program consists of a group of trained parent volunteers who are available to help parents on a one-to-one basis to understand the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and to exercise appropriately rights and responsibilities toward their children. The need for such a group of volunteers was first recognized by the parents. In fact, most progress in the school's special education program has been made in response to parental pressure in some form (Hummel & Humes, 1984). As parents began wrestling with the mandates of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 in their efforts to help each other, they circulated a mass of subjective information based on their own experiences. Furthermore, there was a tendency for some parents to promote biased points of view on the mistaken assumption that what is an appropriate educational program for one child is equally good for another. Too often, an adversarial relationship developed between parents and staff members. Clearly, more structure and cooperation were needed.

This parent assistance program, in cooperation with the public school system, was proposed under the leadership of a local community organization concerned with excellence in all aspects of public education. A philosophy and policy statement was developed, and a plan for the program was designed and presented to the superintendent of schools. The proposal was reviewed and approved; then the director of pupil services was asked to assist in its implementation. The superintendent of schools volunteered to provide the financial resources necessary.

Initiation of Project

The first step was to ask for outside help. A well-known and respected special education specialist from the state department of education was enlisted as a consultant. She was known to both school staff and parents, and her participation was welcomed.

The second step was to appoint a steering committee with representatives from the school's administration, pupil services, and special education departments, as well as from the students' parents. The purpose was to develop a structure and formulate a viable program. The group's intentions were announced to all staff members, and comments were solicited.

The steering committee met six times over a period of 5 months primarily to define the role and limitations of a parent assister. Predictably, there were many concerns. Some professional staff members feared the group would attempt to do what was really the staff's responsibility or might give advice that would interfere with what the staff was trying to accomplish. It was difficult to persuade many staff members that a parent assister might actually improve essential communications. These meetings were invaluable and were used to revise the wording of statements, clarify meanings, and build a degree of trust between parents and staff members. A structure was developed that reflected (a) general agreement on principles, (b) a job description with known responsibilities and limitations, and (c) accountability to both the superintendent of schools and the community organization.

Selection of Parent Assisters

The selection of volunteers to become parent assisters was the primary concern and required procedural safeguards. Each volunteer was recruited and screened by the community organization and then interviewed by pupil services staff. There was final agreement on the potential of all the recruits selected. Anyone who could not accept the basic philosophy of cooperation or make the essential time commitments was eliminated.

Training

The training program was a 4-day workshop designed by the state consultant and presented by pupil services staff from the schools, representatives from the state department of education, and staff from community agencies. The format was as follows: 1st day—overview of handicapping conditions and background on federal and state regulations; 2nd day—school procedures and continuum of services available; 3rd and 4th days—role playing with emphasis on listening and communication skills using an adaptation of a relationship model (Egan, 1975).

Throughout the training it was emphasized that the assisters were not to be advocates. The role of the presenters was not to tell parents what to do but rather to help them to understand their options. The training was continuous and was followed by monthly meetings to upgrade the skills and knowledge of new or upgraded school services. One or two pupil services staff members, usually counselors, always met with the group to discuss events and problems of the month. These pupil services staff members performed a vital liaison function, which became an integral part of training the parents.

Placement of Assisters

The request for a parent assister was always made by a parent in need. This request was usually a telephone call to the volunteer coordinator, who made all the assignments. There were several important guidelines the coordinator followed in deciding which assister was to help a particular parent. These included not assigning anyone to help a good friend or to become involved with school personnel who were dealing with that parent's own child. The assisters' competencies, as reported by parents and staff, were reviewed periodically, and those who consistently fared poorly were given limited assignments or none. The absence of an assignment was explained only if the assister expressed concern.

Evaluation

During the 1st year of operation, 30 parents received one-to-one help, including assister attendance at team meetings. Another 12 parents called for answers to specific questions but did not require further assistance. Although there were no easy solutions and some serious confrontations, communication seemed to improve as a result of assister participation. Program evaluation was accomplished through a survey questionnaire developed jointly by the director of pupil services and coordinator of volunteers, then distributed to all participants. Most parents indicated that they acquired a better understanding of their children's

problems and understood what the school staff hoped to accomplish through the IEP. They also believed that they articulated their own ideas more effectively and participated more in the decision-making process.

Some parents were not satisfied with the decisions of the placement team or the program offered. The parents who had unresolved differences with the school system sometimes proceeded through due process to mediation and even to hearings. If this was the case, the Parent Assisters were still available. Whatever the outcome, this group of volunteers made a contribution toward mutual understanding, on an individual basis, between parents and the school system.

Implications for Counselors

School counselors can play a key role in the initiation and development of a parent facilitation program. They have the skills and assets needed to work with parents. In the pupil services framework they are the most neutral and least threatening of the pupil services. They have no direct ties to the special education community and can approach parents with a nonjudgmental stance. In addition, counselors have training in group dynamics or counseling that will be useful in implementing such a program. They play a key part in the follow-up and maintenance phase of this project.

The starting point in such a program is the needs assessment. Counselors are the staff persons most often associated with general needs assessment in their prime function of serving the developmental needs of all pupils. A specific needs assessment to determine the requirements of special education pupils and their parents is a logical extension of this function. After an assessment is conducted, the counselor must enlist the cooperation and involvement of a parent organization. In the absence of a special education-oriented group, there is always the Parent Teachers Association (PTA). Such a program can be initiated at either the school or district level. If it begins at the school level and is successful, it will undoubtedly expand to other schools.

The counselor should grasp this opportunity to serve special education students and their parents. Counselors have long been overlooked or played insignificant parts in the special education of handicapped pupils. This is an area in which they can make a contribution that is clearly within their role description.

Conclusion

The Parent Assisters program described here has made an impact on the school system and continues to do so. According to information obtained from an

annual survey questionnaire, the program has received good reviews over the past 5 years from counselors and other pupil services staff in the school district.

Counselors and other pupil services specialists reported that although some of the parent volunteers were previously parent activists who could find nothing right with the school district's method of processing handicapped pupils, these attitudes were frequently modified as a result of participation in the program. Dealing with the problems of other pupils had an apparent salubrious effect and helped to place the parents' own concerns in perspective. Many of the assisters ceased to be activists. A tangential effect was better parent and staff preparation for team meetings and a more objective adherence to pupil data and case documentation.

This novel program has significance for all counselors but perhaps especially for those working in the elementary and middle schools where counselors have more frequent contacts with parents and a higher incidence of special education placements. The conceptual approach can be incorporated into a comprehensive guidance program and can be an effective vehicle to meet the requirement for parent counseling of handicapped pupils.

Counseling for parents does exist in the schools, but not to the depth or extent necessary for special education cases. Special educators have neither the time nor training to conduct such counseling; thus, the responsibility reverts to counselors and other pupil services specialists. This is why a Parent Assisters program can be a valuable resource for school counselors. After the need for more parent counseling has been established, the counselor can take a leadership role in the form of parent training, its implementation, and subsequent evaluation. Finally, this novel approach has the considerable potential to be a first-rate public relations tool for both counselors and guidance programs.

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A Program for Training Teachers as Counselors of Parents of Children with Disabilities

Judy O. Berry

Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, brought the team approach to public schools. The process is now firmly in place, but numerous refinements are still needed so that the public school interdisciplinary team will provide maximum benefit to students receiving special education services and to their families. The school counselor is a team member who has the training necessary to provide emotional support for families of children with disabilities, but he or she often has very little time to fulfill this role. The teacher, on the other hand, is in a position to develop an active, ongoing relationship with parents but may lack the training to provide effective counseling support. A study by Westling, Koorland, and Rose (1981) demonstrated that superior special education teachers establish more intense relationships with parents, and yet teachers and other professionals report feeling inadequate and somewhat threatened (McWilliams, 1976) as well as anxious (Price & Marsh, 1985) about performing a counseling role with parents.

It is well documented that parents of children with disabilities want and need an empathic approach from the professionals who work with their children (Sonnerschein, 1981; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1985). Buscaglia (1983) spoke of "the desperate need disabled persons and their families have for good, sound, reality-based guidance, and the tremendous resultant despair and loss of human potential when it is not forthcoming" (p. 5). So the problem becomes one of merging the counselor's training with the teacher's ongoing relationship with parents. Training programs to meet this need have, for the most part, focused on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) conference (Bailey, 1984; Kameen & McIntosh, 1979). Although extremely important, this conference is only the first step in providing support and establishing a positive relationship with parents of children with disabilities.

The purpose of this article is to present the basic components of an in-service training program that can be used by counselors to train teachers to work more effectively with parents through integration of counseling theory and special education practice. This program was developed through counseling consultation, both brief and intense, that I have provided during the past 7 years. For 3 years, I provided consultation to a program at the University of Tulsa serving preschool age children with disabilities and their families. Four special education teachers each year served young children, both in a school setting and

through home visits. I developed a four-session training program for the teachers, and follow-up support was available as needed throughout the school year. Since that time I have provided 12 in-service training programs, based on consumer needs assessments, to special education teachers, regular classroom teachers with mainstreamed students, and speech-language pathologists. I provided these programs for school systems in the Tulsa, Oklahoma, area. The time available for these sessions ranged from 3 to 6 hours, so adaptations were made to accommodate time restraints and needs of the training audience, which ranged from 25 to 50 participants. Each of the following four topical areas should be covered in the in-service training. Preferably, they should be presented in four separate sessions.

Session 1

In the first session, teachers are introduced to the concept of the grief response following loss (Kubler-Ross, 1969). They are told that parents of children with disabilities are likely to experience feelings of guilt, anger, and depression; that they may deny that their child has problems; and that they may bargain or "shop" for diagnostic results that predict a more favorable outcome for their child. An important focus of this session is to point out that parents (especially parents of children with more severe disabilities) have two crucial tasks to handle. One task is adjusting to the loss of the normal child that they expected to rear, and the other is coping with the many challenges of daily living with a disabled child. In discussing the grieving process, it is important to note that the emotional responses of parents will vary relative to the child's age and time of diagnosis. Parents with older children who have known of the diagnosis for a longer time will have worked through much of their grief and will have a greater need for coping strategies. An article by Berry and Zimmerman (1983) is used as a framework for this session, and the teachers are given specific suggestions on how to be supportive of grieving and how to facilitate coping.

Session 2

In the second session family systems theory, or the view of the family as an interactional system (Minuchin, 1974), is applied to families with a disabled member. Turnbull and Turnbull (1986) have done significant work in applying "the family systems approach in the context of exceptionality across the life-cycle" (p. iv). Their work is helpful in providing discussion topics for this session and is a useful resource for future reference. The counselor conducting

this session can draw a contrast between families with and without a disabled member. The presence of a disabled child will affect family resources, family interactions, and the ways in which families can function. It is also important for teachers to consider the influence of family structure, particularly the presence of siblings and the impact of the disabled child on the siblings. The involvement or noninvolvement of extended family members, especially grandparents, is important as well. Alfred Adler's work (Bischof, 1964) concerning birth order and inferiority-superiority can also be useful in presenting this session. Of special help is the issue of *Individual Psychology* (Huber, 1983) in which Adlerian psychology is linked to children with special needs.

It has been my experience that an in-depth discussion of family dynamics helps increase the teacher's sensitivity to the stresses faced on a daily basis by the families of their students. As the teachers become more aware of family systems and family strengths and weaknesses, they are in a better position to provide positive support for families as well as to link families with community programs such as respite care, foster grandparents, sibling support groups, and financial resources.

Session 3

The focus of the third session is parental self-esteem. Teachers need to know that the parents of the children in their class have suffered rejection and humiliation by a society that is not comfortable with the differences their children display. This rejection, combined with the difficult task of meeting the special needs of their children, can undermine their confidence in their ability to be effective parents. In the book *Parents Speak Out: Then and Now* (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1985), parents of handicapped children write candidly of this "battering" of their self-esteem in which, unfortunately, professionals sometimes have a role. Examples from this book are helpful in demonstrating the difficulties these parents face.

Teachers are in a unique position to nurture parental self-esteem, and the third training session presents some strategies for facilitating this endeavor. The importance of being congruent, of being an empathic listener, and, especially, of providing unconditional positive regard are stressed (Rogers, 1961). Being generous with praise of the child and of the child's abilities and accomplishments, as well as of parental involvement in school activities and home programs, is a simple but highly effective way to improve parental self-esteem. Leo Buscaglia's (1983) work is also helpful for this session because of his view that "parents are people first" (p. 77).

Session 4

In the final session teachers are given specific "how to" information for facilitating ongoing communication with the parents of their students. Strategies discussed include assessing needs, planning effective conferences, and enhancing parent involvement in team conferences. Less formal communication is also stressed, including telephone conferences, notes to parents, newsletters, and parent involvement in the classroom. The work of Kroth (1975) and Kroth and Simpson (1977) is helpful in this session.

The principal message of this session is that teachers must view each parent as an individual and must know that individual differences will have a major impact on the level and amount of parent involvement. Grieving reactions, family dynamics, and self-esteem all affect parent involvement, both for parents as a group and for any individual parent over time. Therefore, the understanding that parents gain in the first three sessions is crucial to the successful implementation of the activities presented in the fourth session.

Conclusion

The problem with a program of this type remains one of balancing major needs and limited resources. The intense training that was provided in the preschool setting was very successful but was time consuming and expensive. Evaluation results following the brief sessions have also been gratifying. Long-term evaluation has been limited, but clearly the results are better if the educator receives follow-up support from a counselor in addition to the basic sessions. The recommended reading material has been praised highly and has provided a sound, if impersonal, backup for the educators. This program can be a useful and satisfying way for counselors to provide training for teachers, and it can be adapted to the personnel needs and time constraints of a variety of settings.

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Books Can Break Attitudinal Barriers Toward the Handicapped

Carolyn J. Bauer

Mainstreaming is the practice of providing educational programs for handicapped students in environments that maximize contact with nonhandicapped peers. This practice reflects changes in attitudes about educating the handicapped that have resulted in federal mandates and court decisions. Both require that handicapped students have access to educational and social opportunities that are afforded to their nonhandicapped peers.

Although a major reason for mainstreaming handicapped children into regular classrooms is to increase their contact with nonhandicapped children and decrease their isolation, studies of mainstreaming have found problems with the social integration of handicapped children (Semmel, Gottlieb, & Robinson, 1979). As a group, handicapped children are not chosen as friends as often as other children in the class. Even though they are physically in the mainstream, they often continue to be socially isolated. Helen Keller asserted that the heaviest burdens of disability arise from personal interaction and not from the impairment itself (Baskin & Harris, 1977). Although counselors can exert little control over the reality of the disability, they can help change other children's attitudes and foster a more beneficial social climate.

These studies and comments suggest that our society is contaminated with negative perceptions regarding the handicapped. What can be done to break the barrier and foster nonhandicapped children's positive attitudes toward handicapped persons? Increased contact with handicapped individuals can help, but teachers and parents should not overlook another important tool for breaking the barrier—the honest, objective depictions of handicapped individuals in literature. Books that children read or have read to them provide continuous stimuli through their formative years, and latent and overt messages in stories of exceptional individuals accumulate to form subsequent perceptions.

Research on how children are influenced or changed by books is a recent phenomenon. Although most studies agree that literature is potentially important in the child's value development, the extent of that learning and its permanence have yet to be determined (Waples, Berelson, & Bradshaw, 1958). The results of a study done by Berg-Cross and Berg-Cross (1978) indicated that the expressed attitudes and values of 4-to-6-year-old children can be significantly changed by reading to them a picture storybook that espouses different attitudes.

The research by Monson and Shurtleff (1979) indicated that the use of nonprint media can influence children's attitudes toward people with physical handicaps, particularly when cooperating teachers provide good models and encourage positive attitudes. The research of Gottlieb (1980) found that in the regular classroom, the attitudes of students toward retarded children could be improved by using group discussion. These studies lead to the question: What books can be used to influence children's attitudes toward the handicapped?

A search was made through bibliographies and library collections for books that could develop positive attitudes toward the handicapped. Because attitudes are formed early, the titles were limited to those for use at the elementary level, particularly for the primary grades. Emphasis was put on quality literature that accurately reflects the reality of impairment and avoids false impressions. Because of the abundance of books published about handicaps or handicapped persons, the titles included are necessarily selective. Books dealing with the more prevalent handicaps of mainstreamed young children are listed in eight categories: visual handicaps, speech handicaps, emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, auditory handicaps, intellectual impairments, orthopedically handicapped, and general. The books are appropriate for use from preschool through level three.

Visual Handicaps

Stories about glasses predominate in the books relating to visual handicaps, while one title deals with blindness. The foggy, fuzzy, preglasses state of the heroine is detected in a medical examination during kindergarten in *Katie's Magic Glasses* (Goodsell, 1965). The situation is corrected, and information is given on how visual problems cause social misperceptions. *Jennifer Jean, the Cross-Eyed Queen* (Naylor, 1967) is a picture book portraying a feisty, determined heroine and her discomfort resulting from the rehabilitation process. *Spectacles* (Raskin, 1969) is an amusing and entertaining picture book; Iris adamantly resists getting glasses until a clever optician wins her over by suggesting that the right frames will make her look like a movie star. Mike and Sally are teased because they are the only children who wear glasses in *The Cowboy Surprise* (Wise, 1961), but the situation is remedied when Wild Bill, a bespectacled cowboy, comes to school and explains why some people need glasses. Apprehension about blindness is replaced by a desire for friendship as two young brothers become acquainted with a blind man who plays a harmonica and lives in the same apartment building in *Apt. 3* (Keats, 1971).

Speech Handicaps

A void exists for quality primary-level books dealing with the speech handicapped. The topic is considered in *A Certain Small Shepherd* (Caudill, 1965), but it cannot be evaluated on a literary basis since it is a religious parable.

Emotionally Disturbed

No books dealing with the emotionally disturbed were found for young readers.

Learning Disabled

The frustrations of youngsters who have learning problems are presented in two books for young children. The image of sibling affection, the exploration of frustration, and the accuracy of information presented are strengths of *He's My Brother* (Lasker, 1974). Jamie's disability creates difficulties in school and on the playground. *Leo, the Late Bloomer* (Kraus, 1971) is a fanciful story about a baby tiger who cannot do anything right; he cannot read, write, nor draw; he is a sloppy eater and never talks. His mother assures his father that Leo is a late bloomer, and in his own good time, he blooms!

Auditory Impairment

There are few trade books for the primary level on auditory impairment. The two fiction titles are about girls, and the nonfiction title has a matter-of-fact approach. *Lisa and Her Soundless World* (Levine, 1974) tells how 8-year-old Lisa's handicap was discovered and how hearing aids, lipreading, and sign language were used in treating her disability. The book provides good background on hearing and speaking processes and promotes empathy and understanding. A show-and-tell story in which Angela tells how her hearing deficiency was detected and corrected with a hearing aid is told in *A Button in Her Ear* (Litchfield, 1976). Encouraging evidence of increasing social acceptance of auditory impairment is found in the factual book, *A Show of Hands: Say It in Sign Language* (Sullivan & Bourke, 1980). In cartoon-type drawings and narrative text, it demonstrates the manual alphabet and more than 150 signs, while dealing in a matter-of-fact way with problems of what it is like to be deaf in a hearing world.

Intellectual Impairment

The importance of love and understanding from a supportive family is presented in the book for young readers about intellectual impairment. Even though *One Little Girl* (Fassler, 1969) suffers from a lack of focus as to its appropriate audience, it does emphasize the importance of positive attitudes toward a slow learner. Laurie has intellectual and visual impairments, and her parents and teachers see her improved response after they stop thinking and saying that she is slow and begin emphasizing her abilities.

Orthopedic Impairment

The books for young readers about orthopedic impairments focus on individual characters, and the tone is one of encouragement, hope, and normalcy as the youngsters, despite their handicaps, lead full lives. The problems of daily living associated with cerebral palsy are presented in *Howie Helps Himself* (Fassler, 1975). A real value of the book lies in its honest, accurate, and direct presentation of the problems of a severely physically handicapped child. *Rachel* (Fanshawe, 1975) depicts a young child who enjoys life fully and ignores whenever possible the inconvenience of using a wheelchair. An Alaskan Indian folk tale that treats disability as a mark of favor is found in *At the Mouth of the Luckiest River* (Grieses, 1969). Tatlek, who has a weak, pronated foot, is encouraged by his grandfather's assertion that a good spirit is looking after him. Tatlek deals with his "difference" in a natural, pragmatic fashion.

General

One title is especially noteworthy because it encourages children to imagine themselves in various situations faced by the disabled. *What if You Couldn't . . . ? A Book About Special Needs* (Kamien, 1979) is an informational book about many disabilities that asks the reader to imagine that he or she is a person with a disability and then introduces experiments that help to understand how it feels to have that disability. Hearing and visual impairment, other physical handicaps, emotional disturbances, and learning disabilities are among the conditions included. The direct and matter-of-fact text is an excellent resource book to help dispel ignorance about both the causes and consequences of specific handicaps.

One distinctive feature of books about the handicapped for elementary school children is that they are in general written about children, and the majority are about an individual child. Also, most books deal with only one

handicap rather than multiple handicaps. Almost all the recent books focus on the handicapped character's positive outlook on life and the great gains he or she has made despite a disability.

Implications for Guidance Counselors

Good books about the handicapped are important for two reasons. They provide handicapped children with images and situations with which they can identify, and they help nonhandicapped children achieve an intelligent understanding of the handicapped. In addition, books of this type deal with many sound values, among them courage, understanding, and fair play, which are important to communicate to all children.

Several methods of using books to affect attitudes are available to counselors. Oral reading, group discussion, exposure to aids and appliances of the handicapped, guest speakers, tapes, filmstrips, and films are among the techniques available. Regardless of the method, it is particularly important that the adults provide good models and encourage positive attitudes.

Counselors should emphasize the importance of helping each child fit in and helping others to understand and accept handicapped students. The most crippling handicap is in the mind, not in the body, and that handicap is the attitudinal barrier. Children's books can play a positive role in breaking attitudinal barriers for the handicapped.

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Chapter 5
Counseling Issues in a World of Exceptional Children

Issues for elementary school counselors to consider about a world of exceptional children:

1. How can elementary school counselors and special education teachers collaborate to help parents deal with the needs of exceptional children?
2. Consider some advantages of support groups for parents of exceptional children.
3. What are some of the special problems faced by gifted children?
4. Consider your graduate work in counselor education. What did you learn that has helped you deal with the special needs of exceptional children? What additional training do you need in this area?
5. How can exceptional children improve the learning environment in regular classrooms?
6. Identify several problems that families with gifted children may have. How can elementary school counselors provide support for these families?
7. What are some of the key issues involved in developing support groups for parents of exceptional children? What should be the major goals of these support groups?
8. How can elementary school counselors use books to help educate parents and students about the needs of exceptional children?
9. Discuss what is wrong with the following statement: "Elementary school counselors do not need additional work and should avoid significant roles in the education and support of exceptional children."
10. Discuss the following statement: "All children are exceptional."